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SUBJECT: SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE DELIVERS FIRST VERDICT

11. (U) On June 20, three judges in Trial Chamber II of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) delivered a guilty verdict against three former leaders of the renegade Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) who were on trial accused of war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law.

12. (U) The AFRC were renegade soldiers from the Sierra Leonean Army that overthrew the Government of Sierra Leone on May 25, 1997, and subsequently entered into an alliance and joined forces with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the rebel group that invaded Sierra Leone from Liberia in 1991, with Charles Taylor's support. A third armed faction, the Civil Defense Forces (CDF), was a pro-government paramilitary force that fought against the combined forces of the AFRC and the RUF. A verdict in the CDF trial is expected in July.

13. (U) During the trial, which began in March 2005, the prosecution called 59 witnesses to the stand, while the defense called 87 witnesses. The case hearings were concluded on October 27, 2006.

14. (U) The three former AFRC leaders, Alex Tamba Brima, Brima Bazzy Kamara and Santigie Kanu, were all found guilty of 11 of 14 counts against them. This is the first verdict the SCSL has delivered since its inception in 2002. The defendants were not convicted of sexual slavery as a crime against human dignity, but were found guilty of sexual slavery under another count.

15. (U) Before reading the verdict, Justice Julia Sebutinde, a British-trained Ugandan lawyer, gave a brief recap of the court's mandate and trial proceedings before asking each of the accused to stand up. As she read the verdict, the accused appeared expressionless, as if resigned to their fate. Judge Sebutinde announced that sentencing had been scheduled for July 16.

16. (SBU) Prosecutor Stephen Rapp told the Ambassador that although he does not yet have the text of the judgment, he intends to appeal the court's opinion that the prosecution's accusation of a joint criminal enterprise was improperly presented. Although this did not affect the verdict, Rapp considers this a critical point of contention for other trials, particularly as it has been used effectively in other war crimes courts.

17. (U) There was a significant security presence at the Court. Those in attendance included Sierra Leone human rights organizations, journalists, victims, and family members of the accused. Reactions in the court room mostly supported the verdict, as did people's reactions on the streets of Freetown.

18. (U) The three judges from Trial Chamber II are scheduled to depart Freetown tomorrow for The Hague to resume the Charles Taylor case on June 25. Prosecutor Rapp will remain in Freetown. Brenda Hollis will lead the prosecution team in The Hague. That trial is

expected to conclude by the end of 2008, with a verdict to follow in the first half of 2009.

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